Honey fetch me a cool beer from the fridge!

Karl, Raimund

Interpretierte Eisenzeiten 8

Published: 20/12/2019

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

R. Karl, J. Leskovar [Hrsg.] (2019), Interpretierte Eisenzeiten. Fallstudien, Methoden, Theorie. Tagungsbeiträge der 8. Linzer Gespräche zur interpretativen Eisenzeitarchäologie. Studien zur Kulturgeschichte von Oberösterreich, Folge 49, Linz, 101–114.

Honey, fetch me a cool beer from the fridge! Comfortable living in Iron Age Wales

Raimund Karl

Abstract

Roundhouse reconstructions are traditionally minimalistic, especially where their construction and furnishing is concerned: they have trampled dirt floors, the huge roof space remains unused, and there are only a few and mostly shabbily constructed furnishings. Even the most basic roundhouses attested in the ethnographic record – often pauper's dwellings – tend to be at least as, if not much more fancy than that. Comparing the results from our excavations at Meillionydd with evidence recently collected by Harold Mytum during his excavations of 'his' roundhouse reconstructions during their rebuilding at Castell Henllys, it is demonstrated that the archaeological record of Iron Age roundhouse differs considerably from that created by these modern 'minimalistic' reconstructions. Comfortable Iron Age living in Wales may well have been much more comparable to modern 'glamping' (glamorous camping holidays) experiences than to the comfort offered by 'scientific' reconstructions.

Zusammenfassung

Rekonstruktionen von Rundhäusern sind traditionell minimalistisch, insbesondere was ihre Gestaltung und ihre Einrichtung betrifft: sie haben Stampflehmböden, der gewaltige Dachraum bleibt völlig ungenutzt, und es gibt bestenfalls ein paar windschief zusammengepfuschte Möbel. Selbst die schäbigsten Rundhäuser, die wir aus dem ethnografischen Befund kennen – oft die Wohnungen der Ärmsten der Armen – sind meist einladender als das. Vergleicht man die Resultate der Ausgrabungen in Meillionydd mit den Ergebnissen, die Harold Mytum bei der Ausgrabung der von ihm in Castell Henllys vor etwa 35 Jahren errichteten Rundhausrekonstruktionen während deren Neuerrichtung 2017-2018 gewinnen konnte, zeigt sich, dass sich eisenzeitliche Hausbefunde von denen rekonstruierter „minimalisitischer" Rundhäuser deutlich unterscheiden. Das komfortable Leben in der walisischen Eisenzeit könnte daher, wie sich erweist, weitaus besser mit modernem ‚Glamping'-Wohngefühl (luxuriöses Camping) als mit dem ‚Charme' von ‚wissenschaftlichen' Rekonstruktionen vergleichbar gewesen sein.

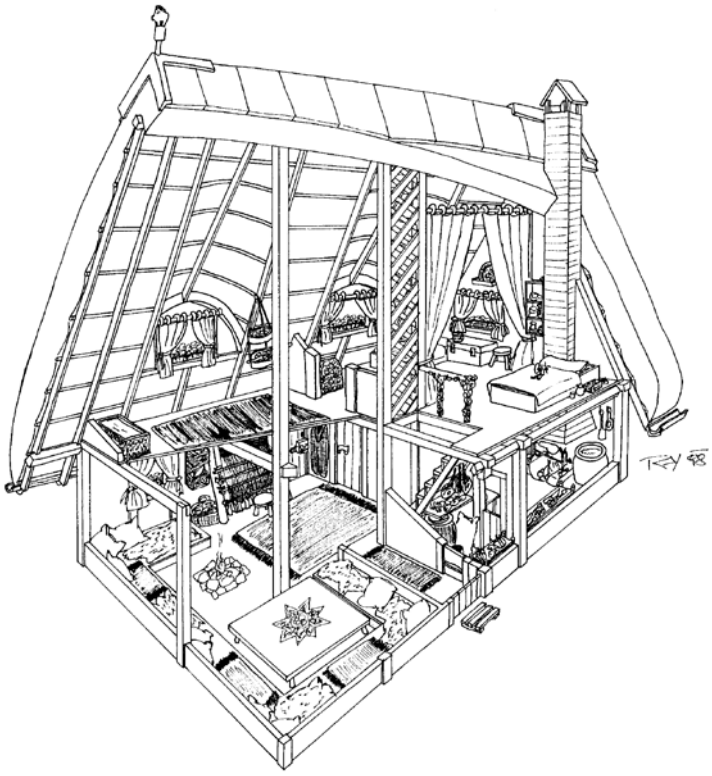

Fig. 1: An alternative reconstruction of a comfortable Continental Iron Age house (Karl 1999).

Almost 20 years ago, taking a radical constructivist approach (e.g. von Foerster et al. 1992) to Iron Age interpretative archaeology, I wrote a paper on Iron Age house reconstructions and why I do not believe in them (Karl 1999). In it, I argued that most of our reconstructions of such houses are much too simplistic, and particularly much too unelaborated and unfurnished, to be representative of what Iron Age architecture most likely looked like (for similar, further developed thoughts along the same lines, also see Karl 2015). Rather, I argued, we should imagine a much wider spectrum of possible differences in the degree of comfort they were offering, dependent as much on local preferences as e.g. the social status and even personal preferences of a particular house's (or settlement's) inhabitants. Indeed, I suggested that at the more 'luxurious' end of the scale, not only could and should we imagine (and reconstruct) quite elaborate and possibly even intricately decorated (e.g. carved) buildings (Karl 2015: 148–151), but also comfortably furnished ones (fig. 1). While that work focussed on Iron Age houses and their reconstruction, it was looking exclusively at Continental European ones, leaving British houses from the same period and their reconstruction completely aside.

Yet, British Iron Age house reconstructions seem to suffer from the same problems, or at least very similar ones. While they may have been built on a round footprint, and the first exemplars chosen for attempted roundhouse reconstructions may have been taken from other (mainly ethnographic) examples, most are also reconstructed based on a particular – and particularly simplistic – visual narrative *topos*: the plain, simple, and mostly unfurnished, primitive Barbarian's dirt(y) hut; using crooked timbers as beams, and equally crooked wood for everything else, and invariably being thatched. They are shown as invariably having trampled dirt floors, no windows or any other useful openings, and often doors that even a small, let alone a tall, individual would have difficulties getting through without at least ducking considerably. If furnished at all, whatever sparse furniture there is equally plain and simple, often being little more than very basic benches or even simple sawed-off tree stumps as 'stools'. Overall, the image created is one of minimal investment into making life not just bearable, but indeed comfortable (figs. 2–4).

HAROLD MYTUM'S CASTELL HENLLYS EXCAVATIONS AND RECONSTRUCTIONS

The roundhouses reconstructed on one of the sites shown above, *Castell Henllys* (fig. 2) are a particularly relevant example for this article, since they were constructed with advice by their excavator, Harold Mytum (2013), on the footsprints of actually excavated Iron Age roundhouses.

Harold Mytum originally excavated Castell Henllys from 1981 to 2008. The site itself is a rather typical Iron Age inland promontory fort (Mytum 2013), which contained evidence of several roundhouses, banks, ditches, etc. Since the excavations became necessary because it was planned to develop the site by its then owner, Huw Foster, a private entrepreneur, into a visitor attraction (Mytum 2013: 25), the first roundhouse reconstruction was built, on/in the original features of an excavated roundhouse, in 1982. Subsequently, several further houses were added. The reconstructed Iron Age village thus created, and its associated museum facilities, was taken over by Pembrokeshire Coast National Park in 1992 (Mytum 2013: 19–25), who in 2017 decided to rebuild the earli-

Fig. 2: The exterior and interior of roundhouse reconstructions at Castell Henllys, Pembrokeshire.

Fig. 3: The exterior and interior of roundhouse reconstructions at Llynnon Mill, Anglesey.

Fig. 4: The exterior and interior of roundhouse reconstructions at the National Museum of Wales, St. Fagans.

est two houses; for health and safety reasons (the reconstructed buildings were considered unsafe; pers. comm. H. Mytum).

Luckily, Mytum was invited back to re-excavate the archaeological traces created by the reconstructions during the demolition of two of the houses (the first and second ones that had been built on the site) in 2017 and 2018, as part of the rebuilding process. Mytum (2017; 2018) provided updates on this work on his blog, including nice pictures of the archaeology recorded, and also recently presented a very nice paper on his work at Bangor University.

This proved very insightful, particularly in comparison with the Iron Age roundhouses and other com-

Fig. 5: Later anachronistic additions to Mytum's original reconstructions during excavation. Harold Mytum is visible on the left image to the right of the stone-built hearth being cleaned (Mytum 2017).

Fig. 6: Substantial trampled floor deposits introduced intentionally (left; Mytum 2018) or having naturally accumulated through visitor activities and footfall (right; Mytum 2017).

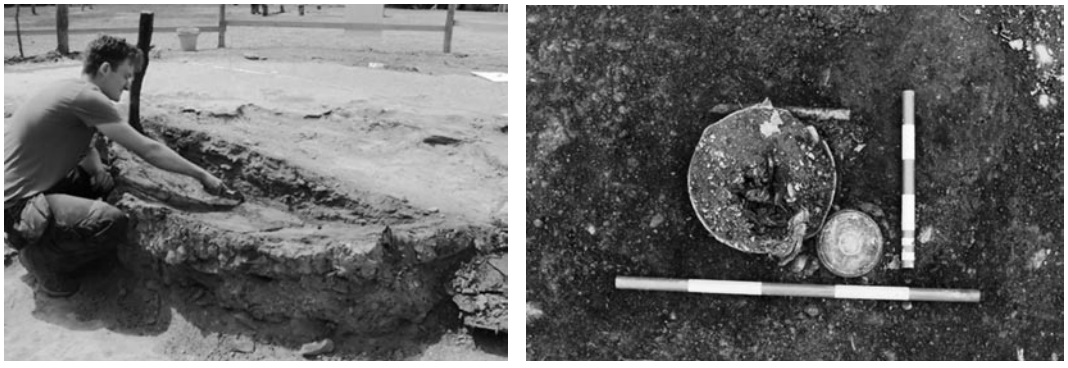

Fig. 7: The substantial deposits associated with a hearth pit in one of the roundhouses (left; Mytum 2018) and finds of portable 'antiquities' in situ (right; Mytum 2017).

parable features Bangor University has been excavating since 2010 in *Meillioydd* on the *Llŷn* peninsula (see most recently, Karl 2018; George this volume). Mainly, this is the case because pretty much nothing in Mytum's results appears to be in any way comparable to the evidence we have produced during our excavations of original Iron Age features, especially concerning the archaeology of the floor deposits in the houses.

What Mytum found during his excavations of the reconstructed roundhouses can be described as a quite distinctive archaeological record. Leaving aside obvious 'flaws' like a solid stone-built hearth or stone hinges for the doors added later to his original reconstructions (fig. 5), the excavations produced evidence for – partially substantial – floor deposits, some of which had been intentionally introduced in several subsequent attempts to level the floor of a house which had been built on a slope, while others had naturally accumulated through constant visitor footfall (fig. 6). Clearly, these floor deposits had the typical, highly compressed structure and slightly rigged surface of floor deposits known from some excavations, contained repairs of 'potholes' and other depressions that had been created by constant use, some including ashy deposits from the activities that had been conducted in the houses (figs. 5-6). They also contained substantial deposits of 'earlier' phase hearths, and in some places also the odd find of modern portable 'antiquities' (fig. 7). In other words: these floor deposits appeared as one would expect them to if a house floor was used (that is, walked, jumped, trampled, etc. upon) for c. 30 years by people 'inhabiting' it (even if, in the particular case, only very temporarily, though I personally inhabited one of them for three consecutive days when attending a hand-fastening of an acquaintance in 2002 at Castell Henllys), with the odd one occasionally dropping something on the floor which got swept behind something and ultimately becoming a part of the floor deposit.

THE MEILLIONYDD EXCAVATIONS

Kate Waddington, Katharina Möller and I have been directing excavations at Meillionydd on the Llŷn peninsula in North Wales from 2010 to 2017, which we hope to be able to resume again from 2019 onwards. Meillionydd is a typical late Bronze and Iron Age double ringwork enclosure (Karl 2018), located on the crest of a ridge jutting out from the lower slopes of Mynydd Rhiw. It is well comparable to Castell Henllys in date, size, overall shape and even general landscape setting (Mytum 2013), even though it is not (quite) set on an inland promontory. It also is very similar to Castell Henllys in terms of the range of features discovered during its excavation: it shows ample evidence of dense occupation with evidence for frequent rebuilding of roundhouses, banks, ditches, etc.

It is, however, also different to Castell Henllys in some regards, like the internal structure or arrangement of buildings, with particularly many roundhouses from at least 13 consecutive building phases clustered near the entrance into the enclosure (in the enclosed phases of the site, which not all phases were). During the embanked enclosure phases of the site, these roundhouses mostly were set in the quarry hollows which had been constructed for extracting material for building (at least some) of the bank bodies, on the respective inner side of both the outer (see also George, this volume) and inner bank. The bottoms of these quarry hollows provided reasonably level – but in several cases still considerably sloping – standings on which houses could conveniently be built.

The very fact that these houses had been built into these quarry hollows also meant that in several places, the – during these phases internally and externally drystone-faced, earth-filled – walls of the houses were still preserved to two or three layers of drystone facing. They thus also contained considerable amounts of infill, in some cases quite definitely mostly added following soon after the abandonment of the respective house, quite possibly as part of an abandonment rite (Karl 2013). Yet, none of them contained any significant floor deposits, let alone substantial trampled floors in any way comparable to what Mytum (2017; 2018) had found during his excavations of the reconstructed roundhouses at Castell Henllys.

If at all present, floor deposits were quite ephemeral and consisted of very loose dark earth, containing no finds whatsoever. Also, the actual house floors, consisting of apparently also never significantly trampled upon natural (partially with stones sticking out in odd and very inconvenient angles, which is typical for the natural om site, which is a glacial deposit), contained numerous features cut deeper into the natural, like various gullies, ash-pits (sometimes erroneously referred to as ‚hearths'), and storage pits, as well as various postholes. In fact, not only were these floors obviously never walked upon, it is debatable whether they could have been walked upon

during the normal use of the houses, at least without those inhabiting ever so often breaking their legs, or at least seriously bumping their toes on bits sticking out of or holes in the floor.

SURFACE WATER DRAINAGE ON SITE

Also, the location of the houses, particularly those in the entrance area(s), created particular problems due to the drainage of surface water on the site.

The site sits on the crest of a little hill, which in the embanked phases was completely enclosed apart from where the entrances were, which were placed at the lowest points of the enclosure (this also applies to a possible second entrance through both banks to the West, not just the already excavated entrance to the East; fig. 8). The banks also have, particularly close to the excavated entrance, internal quarry hollows following them. Thus, the only way for surface water having fallen anywhere within the enclosures to drain would be, first, into the quarry hollows – where the houses sit – and then – but only through these houses – out through the entrances (fig. 9).

This must have created significant drainage problems, at least during times of heavy rainfall, resulting in considerable efforts having been invested into the management of water in house floors, particularly in the entrance areas, by the inhabitants of the site. To ensure sufficient drainage, especially of the floors of houses set in the terminals of the inner quarry hollows of both the inner and outer bank, gullies were constructed (fig. 10). Particularly within the houses, they were partially stone-lined and covered with – in some cases quite sizeable – reasonably flat capping stones, which nonetheless did not create an even remotely level surface for the house floor, but rather stick out quite far in places, and leave awkward gaps and crevasses between them (fig. 11). These gullies drained the houses through culverts exiting underneath the house wall in case of the inner entrance gully system; and underneath the southern outer bank terminal in case of the outer entrance gully system (fig. 10; also see George, this volume).

Particularly the latter culvert actually is covered by the bank for a stretch of c. 5 meters in length and, based on the stratigraphy, must have been constructed in a single event together with the roundhouse it drains and the bank terminal. This clearly indicates that the whole architectural unit – that is, the roundhouse directly south of (and opening through a door onto the metalled road through) the outer entrance, the outer entrance passage itself, and the bank terminals creating it – not only were intentionally created as a 'designed' unit; but were consciously designed with the site's water drainage management being one particularly relevant consideration during planning.

Since the bank body shows no evidence of having been cut by a trench to put in the culvert, the sequence of construction of this unit must have been as follows: firstly, the quarry hollow was dug. Secondly, the gully system for the drainage of its terminal was built, with the house later constructed in it at least planned, or, more likely, its footprint already marked out on the construction site. Rather than taking the shortest route to drain water from the house by digging this gully towards the east, a longer route towards the north was chosen and the stone-lined and -capped culvert created that would go underneath the bank terminal. In addition, a small gully was dug, right inside where the door into the house was intended to go, where the ground dropped into the quarry hollow in a c. 20cm step; this gully emptying into a deep sinkhole underneath where the porch wall would jut out from the bank terminal body. Thirdly, the bank including its terminal and the roundhouse was built, on top of the culvert and sink hole. Then, finally, the road surface going into the enclosure was metalled, with the metalling extending into the doorway of the house and sloping downwards towards it. Thus, surface water running down it would enter the house underneath the door, run down the step inside, into the gully, and drain into the sink hole. Surface water seeping through the back wall, on the other hand, would drain into the main gully and out underneath the bank.

OTHER FEATURES IN HOUSE FLOORS

In addition to the drainage systems, other features also abound in house floors.

In many houses, rectangular pits were cut into the floor, reasonably centrally placed, though almost invariably slightly off-centre by less than or just about a metre (fig. 12). Their fill also almost invariably is very rich in ashy

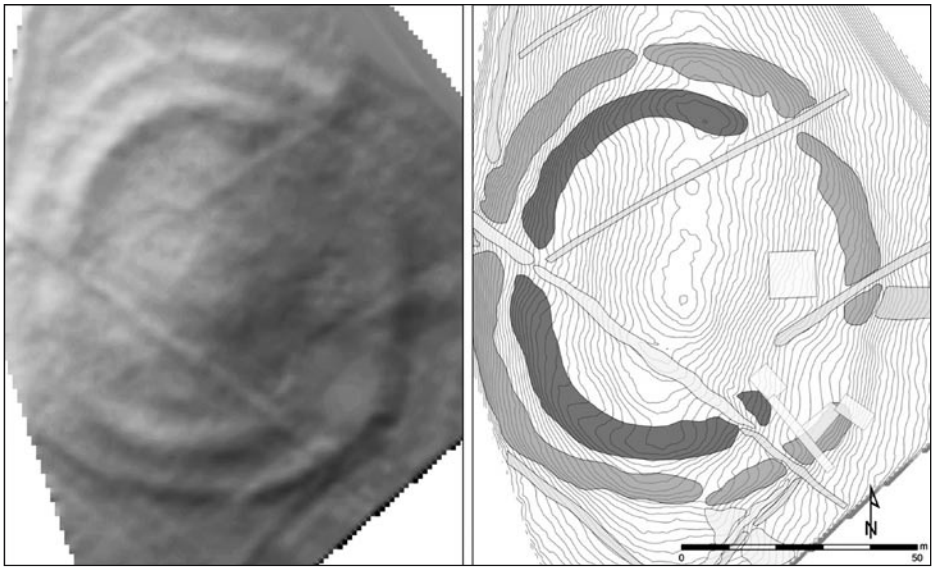

Fig. 8: Hillshade and elevation model of Meillionydd (Löcker et al. 2013: 20, Abb. 12).

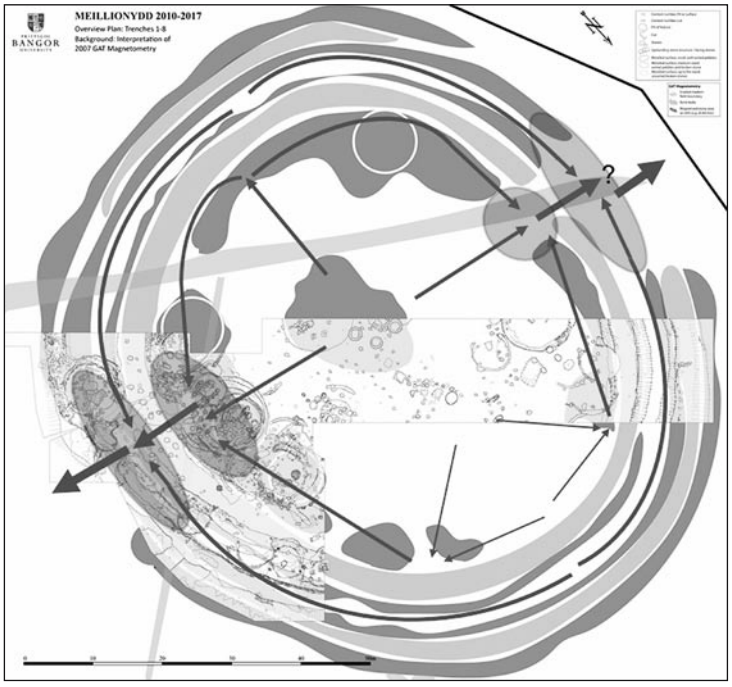

Fig. 9: Drainage of surface water from the enclosures at Meillionydd.

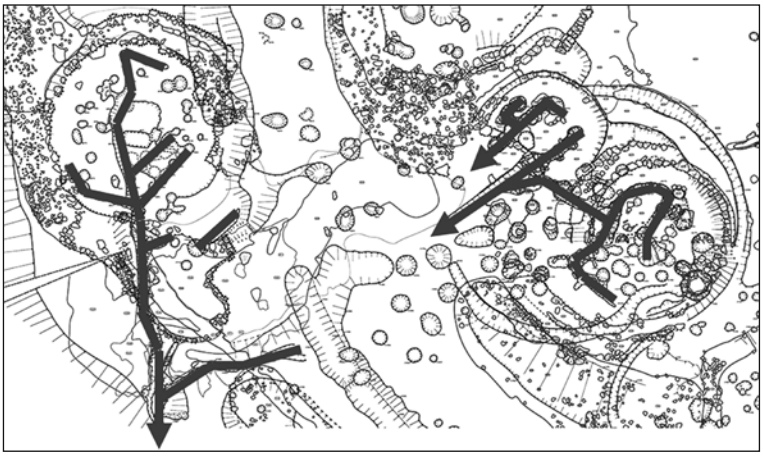

Fig. 10: Drainage management by stone-lined and (at least partially, mostly within houses) stone-capped gullies in the roundhouses associated with and in the eastern entrance area.

Fig. 11: Capped drainage gully in the southern half of the roundhouse built into the terminal of the northern inner quarry hollow alongside the inner bank, closest to the inner entrance passage into the enclosure (the curve of large stones in the house floor on the left in the image). Note that while covering the gully, the capping stones do not create a level surface and do not cover the gully completely. Also note the stones irregularly sticking out of the natural which makes up the hut floor, and that the inner drystone facing of the house's walls is not set into a foundation trench, but rather partially sits halfway up the sloping sides of the inner quarry hollow terminal.

deposits, in some cases mostly or almost exclusively consisting of ash. Frequently, intermixed with the ashes, are a few irregular, but partially quite sizeable, bits of lightly burnt clay / daub like one would expect to form on a hearth's surface (cf. fig. 7 left for such a hearth and its surface from Castell Henllys). Yet, the sides and bottoms of those pits never show any evidence of having been at all, let alone seriously, affected by heat, let alone actually having been burnt (fig. 12), as would inevitably happen if there ever had been a fire burning in them.

Thus, while on site we tend to refer to them colloquially as 'hearths', they are actually not hearths, but would better be described as ash-pits. Of course, as ash-pits – that is, quite literally, pits to collect and at least temporarily store ashes – they will obviously have been associated with hearths or fireplaces, from which the ashes collected in them will have been swept. Yet, no such hearth or fireplace – that is, a sizeable clay or daub surface burnt like the bits we sometimes do find in the fill of the ash-pits – have as yet been found in any of the house floors, or indeed anywhere outside any of the remains of houses on site. Thus, while hearths or fireplaces associated with these ash-pits must obviously have existed, and presumably were placed right next to these ash-pits (that is, at the very centres of the houses) so that the ashes could be swept into them once the fire had died down, they obviously were not placed on the house's natural floor, but somewhere above it.

Also, two houses immediately north of the inner entrance, set in the inner quarry hollow alongside the inner bank, contained stone-lined pits, with c. 80 cm inner diameter, of c. 50 cm depth, in their floor. In one case, this pit must have been constructed, including its stone-lining, when the house was built, since its uppermost stones (visible in the trench section on fig. 13) were actually not so much part of the pit's stone lining, but the bottom layers of the inner drystone facing of the house's wall. In the other case, the pit may have equally been constructed to have its lining continue unbroken into the inner drystone facing of that house's wall (which was not preserved in this place), or may have been built just slightly inside of it. In both cases, however, these pits were set into the northern side of the respective house, that is, uphill towards where the inner quarry hollow was sloping downwards towards the inner entrance passage. Thus, they were located within their respective houses where surface water would have collected outside the house's outer wall facing and then (all the walls have an earth core with inner and outer drystone facing) slowly seeped through it into the house, also unavoidably seeping into these pits.

Yet, apparently, no attempt was made to prevent that by putting in water drainage management features, as is clearly evident in case of the pit in the more southerly of those two houses (fig. 10, close to the right edge of the

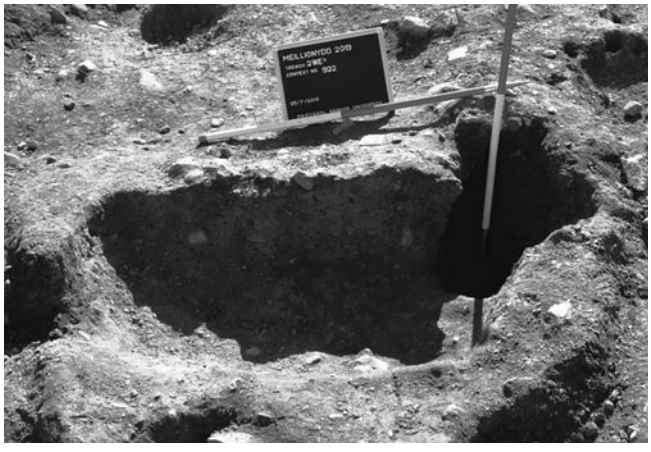

Fig. 12: The ash-pits of the roundhouse immediately south inside the outer entrance after excavation. Note that the natural in which they have been dug shows no indication whatsoever of ever having been affected by heat.

Fig. 13: The stone-lined pit set in the northern wall of the roundhouse immediately north of the inner entrance passage during excavation.

plan). This is one of the houses which had a substantial and also well-planned drainage system in its floor, which, however, only starts roughly in its centre, rather than on its northern side. This indicates quite clearly that the builders of this house either simply did not care, or indeed intentionally put the pit in this place where surface water would, at least during periods of heavy rainfall, inevitably seep into it.

While we believe that these stone-lined pits were used as burial pits as their final use (see Möller 2017: 71-74; George this volume), they most likely were not originally built for this final function. Rather, most likely, they were used as in-house storage pits for most of their use-life. Yet, not just because of their location in the worst possible place anywhere on site for, but also because we did find considerably more sizeable, not stone-lined, outdoors grain storage pits (one of them still containing about 30 litres of charred grains) at the very crest of (and thus the driest place on) the enclosed hill, it seems evident that these pits were not used for grain (or other dry) storage. Instead, they were put in the darkest, wettest and thus presumably also coolest place one could find on the site, and were – thanks to the stone lining – also very well protected from cave-ins of the pit walls. I would thus suggest that these in-house storage pits were originally intended as cold (or at least cool) storage, to keep perishable goods 'refrigerated' and thus extend their use-live as much as possible.

FLOATING FLOORS AND TRAP DOORS?

Where (at least the better-built) houses (in the stone-built occupation phases) in Meillionydd are concerned, we thus have to arrive at the conclusion that, rather than walking on simple trampled dirt floors, their inhabitants fancied nicely boarded floating timber floors. Beneath them, they had a well-planned water drainage system, which probably served to keep the floor boards and the trusses beneath them as dry as possible, to prevent them from rotting as long as possible.

That floor boards were known and (at least in some

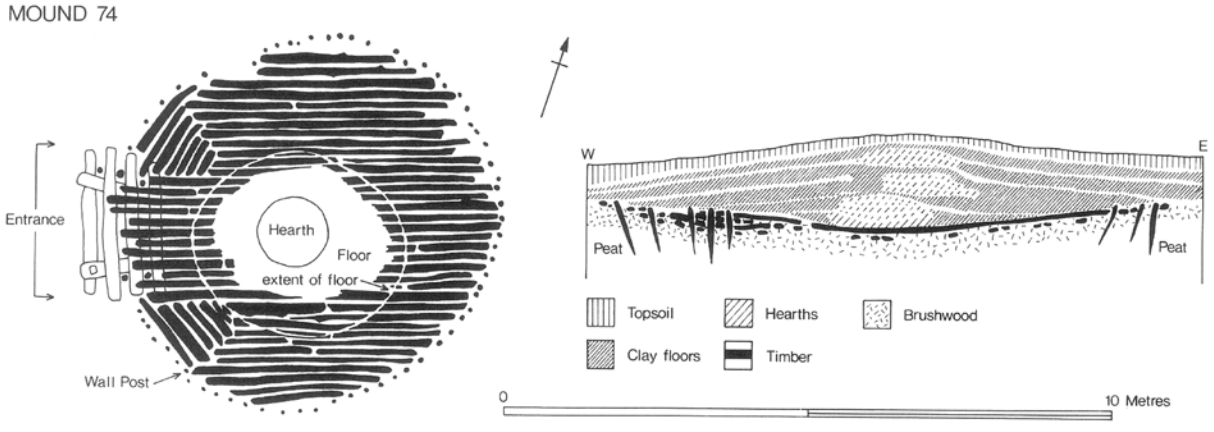

Fig. 14: Iron Age boarded floor in a Glastonbury Lake village roundhouse (Cunliffe 1991: 241).

Fig. 15: The *Trawsfynydd Tankard* (Lynch et al. 2000: plate 12).

cases) used in the British Iron Age cannot reasonably be denied: there is direct proof positive available in the results of the excavations of Glastonbury Lake village (Cunliffe 1991: 241; fig. 14). While the ones at Glastonbury admittedly were not floating floors, it also cannot be denied that floating floors were known and used at least in other parts of Iron Age Britain: after all, *brochs* (effectively, complex drystone-built tall roundhouses; Armit 2003) are partially still standing, with some showing clear evidence of upper storeys (including nice stone stairs leading up to them in the drystone-built walls). These upper storeys must have had floating floors, unless one wishes to assume that Iron Age Scots were actually floating people.

The floating floors of Meillionydd, however high above the natural house floors they were positioned (which in case of the roundhouse immediately south inside the outer entrance, presumably was at least about 20 cm, given that this is roughly the height of the step down from the metalled doorway to the natural hut floor), thus can be assumed to have existed. It also can be assumed that – since the ash-pits and (where they existed) 'refrigerator' pits needed to be accessible to be useful at all – the pits in the house's natural floors were normally hidden under trap doors in the floor boards, only opened when something needed to be put inside or taken out of them. Also, presumably at the centre of the wooden floor, a clay/daub layer had been put down to form a fireplace, or indeed even a raised hearth stood, to make firing and using it more comfortable, with the ashes swept 'under the floor' (rather than just a carpet) when the fire had died down and they had cooled sufficiently. Indeed, given the lack of small finds in the lower fills of our roundhouses, we can even assume that the floorboards were tightly laid or even tongued and grooved, preventing small objects from falling through the cracks.

All in all, this indicates that at least the 'better' houses in Meillionydd had very well-built, well-maintained, and probably also reasonably cleanly kept wooden floors. After all, why else would you sweep your ashes into ash-pits through a purpose-built trapdoor, if not to keep your house (and indeed its floor) reasonably clean and cosy. Indeed, one might even wonder whether the drainage gullies underneath the floor boards did not also serve yet another purpose: to prevent having to go to the *ty bach*, the outhouse, or even onto a midden, to relieve oneself. The quite high concentration of phosphorus in the fill of these gullies (George, this volume), thus, might well be evidence for human waste disposal via a sewer from an indoors lavatory. Though that, presumably, would be much too incredible comforts for Iron Age living, wouldn't it?

ON THE MATTER OF FURNITURE AND OTHER HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

Of course, direct archaeological evidence for even more comforts, like furniture, is quite sparse, if it exists at all. Apart from metal furniture like the odd fire-dog for putting a few spits over your hearth or fireplace, there is hardly anything (other than perhaps the odd, hard to interpret, piece of carved or turned wood).

We do know a few bits and pieces though, which tell us about Iron Age woodworking skills, like that stave-built tankards were used, some covered in sheet metal with elaborately decorated handles like the *Trawsfynydd Tankard* (Lynch 2000 et al.: plate 12; fig. 15). We also know that Iron Age wheelwrights were able to shrink continuous iron tyres onto segmented or steam-bent spoked wooden wheels; and that Iron Age 'carts' (fig. 16) seem to have been rather elaborate constructions created

by quite skilled carpenters (incidentally: ever noticed the uncanny similarity between the word *carpenter* and the most commonly used 'Celtic' term for chariots, loaned into classical Latin as *carpentum*?; Karl, Stifter 2013).

We thus can surmise that Iron Age (Welsh) carpenters will probably also have been reasonably skilled, and were likely to be able to produce better, and indeed much better, furniture than one usually gets to see (if at all) in Iron Age roundhouse reconstructions. If carpenters at that time were indeed able to build chariots with platforms hung in rope suspensions, they may well also have built equally comfy sofas, with seats hung in rope suspensions. If they could build frames with wooden 'ribs' across them for doubly comfortable chariots, surely they would equally have been able to build bed frames with wooden springs across for all the more comfort when sleeping. And whoever can build anything like these things surely can also build all other kinds of furniture imaginable, and indeed decorate it lavishly, if that be desired. And that lavish decorations of rather utilitarian items like tankards were desired, at least by some, is more than plainly evident from the *Trawsfynydd* one.

As such, there is no reason to assume that every Iron Age roundhouse in Britain was only sparsely furnished, and all furniture (and other household items kept in the house) as plain, simple, undecorated and uncomfortable as imaginably possible. Quite to the contrary, much like I have argued for Continental Iron Age houses 20 years ago, we have every reason to believe that at least some, if not many, were quite nicely furnished, with well-made, and possibly even quite elaborately decorated, as pretty as comfortable furniture.

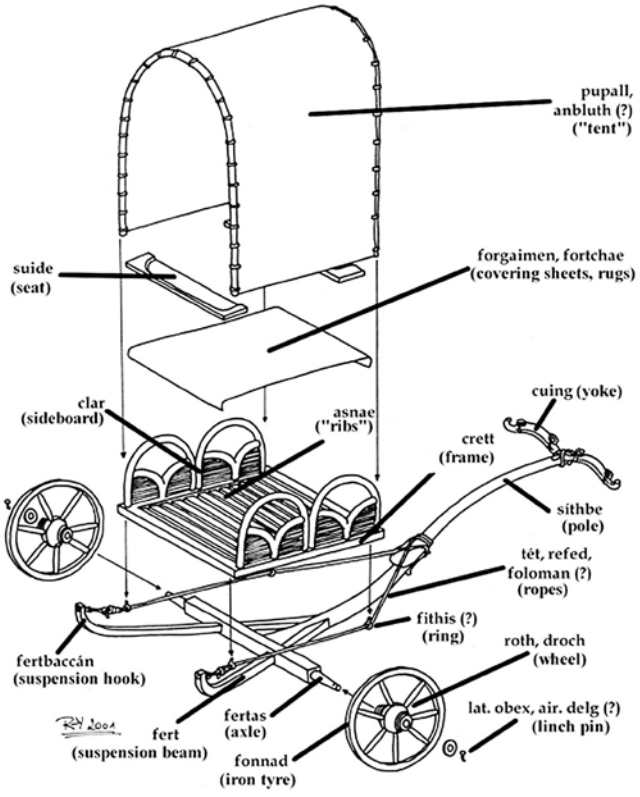

Fig. 16: A reconstruction of an Iron Age chariot, terminology based on Early Medieval Irish saga literature (Karl, Stifter 2013).

EARLY MEDIEVAL IRISH TEXTS...

Nor is there any reason to believe that furniture was sparse. While not from the Iron Age 'proper', we do have historical evidence from latest Iron Age (that is, early medieval) Ireland, of what one could expect in terms of both furniture, and household equipment, at least in the main dwelling of a wealthier member of the community. And with wealthy, I mean a wealthy farmer, not a nobleman or even king. *Críth Gablach*, the 6-7th cent. AD Irish law *'on status and franchise'*, provides extensive lists of furniture and other household items which could be expected to be found in a rich farmer's roundhouses; not least because it provides details as to compensation payable to him if any of it be damaged (Mac Neill 1923: 292).

For instance, if one damages a rear post of his couch, one has to compensate him with a yearling heifer, if the damage is to one of the front posts, a yearling bull. Damage to troughs, furniture, or any other woodwork *‚supposed to be kept on the floor'*, *‚up to the wall'* (of the house) also requires a payment of a yearling heifer as compensation. For damage to his *‚foran'* (‚splendid, fine') kitchen – probably some wooden furniture related to cooking – the same damages are payable as for damage to couches. There is also compensation required for damage to pillows, rugs, mats, blankets and beddings: for a handful of stuffing taken out of a pillow, a good pillow has to be supplied. For a handful of straws taken from bedding, a good skin blanket; and so on (Mac Neill 1923: 292).

The compensation payable, particularly for damage to furniture, seems quite significant: a yearling heifer is equivalent to c. 6.5 grams of silver according to the early Irish laws (Karl 2019: 331). According to Thucydides (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 3,17.4), a *drachma*,

a c. 4.3-gram silver coin, was the daily wage for a skilled labourer or a hoplite in late 5th century BC Greece. Assuming pay rates in early medieval Ireland were the same as that, damaging just a part of furniture thus apparently would have cost the offender the equivalent of a day and a half's skilled labour. Given that compensation in Irish law seems usually aimed at ensuring full restitution of the actual damages incurred by the aggrieved party, this implies that repairing the damage caused was estimated to cost the equivalent of roughly a day's work by a skilled carpenter. And that, in turn, probably allows us to assume that building a piece of furniture like the ones listed in this text will have taken a few days of skilled labour each, and thus, that it was quite nice and well-made furniture, quite possibly nicely decorated.

Such a wealthy farmer also definitely needs quite a bit of nice and well-built furniture, because he owns quite a few household items, too. As *Críth Gablach* puts it: *‚…with all the apparatus of his house in their proper places: a cauldron with its spits and supports; a vat in which a boiling [of ale] may be stirred (?); a cauldron for ordinary use [and its] utensils, including irons and trays and mugs, …; a washing-trough and a bath, tubs, candlesticks, knives for cutting rushes, ropes, an adze, an auger, a saw, a pair of shears, a trestle (?), an axe; the tools for use in every season, every implement thereof unborrowed; a qrindstone, mallets, a billhook, a hatchet, spears for killing cattle; a fire always alive, a candle on the candlestick without fail; a full ownership of a plough with all its outfit‘* (Mac Neil 1923: 291) are the equipment of a rich farmer's house. That is quite a lot of items, and they have to be safely stored most of the time, because if they are out of their proper place and accidentally get damaged, no compensation is payable. Also: *‚He and his wife have (each) four costumes‘* (Mac Neill 1923: 291), so at least 6 sets of clothing will have to be put somewhere, so there must be some chests or other furniture to store them while they are not needed.

Admittedly, such a wealthy farmer doesn't keep all of this in one house, but rather has *'a dwelling of twenty-seven feet, an outhouse of seventeen feet'* (Mac Neill 1923: 291) in diameter, so that is a c. 8.25 and a c. 5.2 metre diameter roundhouse. Assuming that the inner diameter of the house is given, those two houses give a maximum useable floor space of 74.5 square metres it total. Given all the stuff that the farmer, his wife, and their children own – because we do have to assume the presence of at least two of the latter on average, given that populations at least seem to have remained stable – an early medieval Irish farmer's dwelling and outhouse must have been rather crammed full, not sparsely furnished. And there is little reason to believe that a rich Iron Age farmer's house and outhouse would have been any different, given that there's no significant change in technological or economic conditions between the Iron Age and the Early Medieval period in Ireland.

COMFORTABLE EARLY MEDIEVAL LIVING IN IRELAND

Críth Gablach also tells us a little bit about what furniture would be expected in the house of an Irish lord. For instance, a relatively high-ranking nobleman, has *'Eight beds in his house, with their full furnishing for the house of an* aire túise*, including six couches, these having their proper furnishings, both cushions and rugs. Proper sets of furniture in the house, woodwork (?) of every size, and irons for every use and bronze vessels, including a cauldron which holds a beef and a bacon hog'*. He also has *'Twelve horse-bridles, one of gold, the others of silver. He has not to beg (?) for pet animals, deer-hound, fighting-men, lap-dogs for his wife. He has the implements for every work, with a plough and its full lawful equipment'*. And we might also want to consider: *'Twenty-nine feet (is the measurement of) his house, nineteen his outhouse'* (Mac Neill 1923: 299). That is a c. 8.85 metre and a c. 5.8 metre diameter roundhouse, which gives us a maximum combined footprint of 88 square metres. Assuming all the 8 beds and 6 couches are situated in the house rather than the outhouse, with its maximum footprint of 61.5 square metres, and reserving 4 square metres for a central fireplace, that would leave roughly 4.1 square metres per major piece of furniture for sitting on or lying down. It becomes difficult to imagine that people could still have occupied such a space without constantly setting themselves, or some of the couches closer to the fireplace, alight, let alone use such a crammed space as a 'lord's hall', if not at least most of the beds were relegated to an upper floor, even if that isn't mentioned.

Particularly useful in the context of interpreting the archaeology of Meillionydd is yet even more information that *Críth Gablach* provides us with. It tells us about the wealthy farmer that *'There be two casks in his house always, a cask of milk and a cask of ale … so that he may be ready to receive king or bishop or doctor or judge from the road, and for*

Fig. 17: 21st century AD 'glamping' roundhouses, Stratton-on-the-Fosse, Somerset (left, http://glossy-glamping.co.uk/theroundhouse/#more [13.1.2019]) and 'Love in the Round', Cornwall (right, https://www.canopyandstars.co.uk/britain/england/cornwall/love-in-the-round/love-in-the-round#search_type=keyword&search_text=& [13.1.2019]).

the visits of every company' (Mac Neil 1923: 291). Both milk and ale keep longer and are more refreshing for potentially visiting dignitaries and the farmer alike if they are stored in a cool place, so I guess they would have been kept in the fridge. Also, *Críth Gablach*'s wealthy farmer is *'A man of three sacks (that he has) always in his house for each quarter of the year: a sack of malt, a sack of sea-ash against the cutting up of joints of his cattle, a sack of charcoal for iron'* (Mac Neil 1923: 291). Of course, the ash used for treating wounds of his livestock must have been gathered somewhere before being put in its sack. Might it be that this is what the ash-pits might have been for?

CONCLUSIONS: COMFORTABLE IRON AGE LIVING

The evidence presented in this article should have amply demonstrated that, indeed, we should imagine Iron Age roundhouses quite differently from the reconstructions we normally get to see; at least if they come from an apparently upper-class settlement, or even only a wealthy farm. While there certainly will have been quite many simple Iron Age houses, with dirty trampled dirt floors, sparsely furnished with only a crudely built bed, a few sawn- or hacked-off tree-stumps as seats and/or tables, and little else, many roundhouses will have been much nicer than that.

Rather, as the results from the Meillionydd excavations demonstrate, at least some roundhouses must have had well-built, floating wooden floors. These floors must have contained trapdoors, enabling access to underfloor features in the house. These features include near-central pits for collecting ash (for medicinal purposes and/or soap-making?) from a fireplace or hearth erected upon the wooden floor boards; and also, in some cases, cool storage pits for the 'refrigeration' of perishable goods, like milk and ale for drinking.

It is also quite likely that at least the dwellings, and most likely also the 'outhouses' (presumably used as the kitchen and workshop of the household?), of at least wealthier members of Iron Age British societies were richly furnished, with numerous different pieces of furniture (perhaps even matching in terms of style and decoration?) for bedding, seating, and the presenting and storing of portable objects. Not only did wealthier members of the community most likely own a plethora of – at least partially – quite valuable objects, which had to be kept and stored somewhere; but, in cases of objects like the *Trawsfynydd Tankard* (fig. 15), also quite fancy objects which even may have been displayed prominently for any visitor attending a banquet in the house to clearly see.

In fact, it may well be possible that particularly outstandingly rich members of the social elite, or 'nobility', like the owners of Meillionydd are not entirely unlikely to have been, had sufficient possessions that they would not all have fitted into just their 'main' c. 10 metre diameter 'dwelling' (c. 78.5 m² footprint). Rather, they may

well have had an upper storey in their main roundhouse to gain some extra space, and have used several of the c. 7 metre diameter 'outhouses' (c. 38.5 m² footprint each) present on site as additional living room.

Thus, living in a wealthy Iron Age household, at least if one happened to belong to the owner's family, or be the head of one, may well have been quite comfortable. It may indeed have felt more akin to roundhouse 'glamping' as e.g. in Stratton-on-the-Fosse in Somerset or the 'Love in the Round' 'glamping' house in Cornwall (fig. 17). Well, perhaps, unless you were happened to be married to the fat, lazy head of the household, who, when slouching on his comfy sofa listening to the latest bard who had happened to pop by couldn't be bothered to move his butt and shouted, for the umpteenth time that evening: *"Honey, fetch me a cool beer from the fridge, will ya?!? … Burp."*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Armit, I. (2003), Towers in the North. The Brochs of Scotland. Stroud: Tempus.

Cunliffe, B.W. (1991), Iron Age Communities in Britain. 3rd ed., London & New York: Routledge.

Karl, R. (1999), Rekonstruktionen keltischer Wohnanlagen und warum ich nicht an sie glaube. Webjournal für Keltologie, 22.8.1999: https://www.univie.ac.at/keltologie/rekonstruktionen_keltischer_wohn.html.

Karl, R. (2013), Siedlungsbestattung? In: Karl, R., Leskovar, J. [Hrsg.], Interpretierte Eisenzeiten. Tagungsbeiträge der 5. Linzer Gespräche zur interpretativen Eisenzeitarchäologie. Studien zur Kulturgeschichte von Oberösterreich 37, 283-98.

Karl, R. (2015), Visualising the unknown knowns in archaeology: why prehistory must not always look the same. In: Karl, R., Leskovar, J. [Hrsg.], Interpretierte Eisenzeiten. Tagungsbeiträge der 6. Linzer Gespräche zur interpretativen Eisenzeitarchäologie. Studien zur Kulturgeschichte von Oberösterreich 42: 141-52.

Karl, R. (2018), Social Changes in Late Bronze and Early Iron Age Wales. The Beginning of Celtic Wales? In: Karl, R., Möller, K. (eds.), Proceedings of the Second European Symposium in Celtic Studies held at the University of Bangor from July 31st to August 3rd 2017. Hagen/Westfalen: 163-183.

Karl, R. (2019), „Two casks in his house always, a cask of milk and a cask of ale". Foodstuffs as currency in pre-monetary capitalist economic systems. In: Stockhammer, P.W., Fries-Knoblach, J. [Hrsg.], Was tranken die frühen Kelten? Leiden: 321-338.

Karl, R., Stifter. D. (2013), Carpat – carpentum. Die keltischen Grundlagen des ‚Streit'wagens der irischen Sagentradition. In: Eibner, A., Karl, R., Leskovar, J., Löcker, K., Zingerle, Ch. [Hrsg.], Pferd und Wagen in der Eisenzeit. Arbeitstagung des AK Eisenzeit der ÖGUF gemeinsam mit der AG Reiten und Fahren von 23.-25.2.2000 in Wien. Wiener keltologische Schriften 2: 121-148.

Löcker, K., Trausmuth, T., Wallner, M. (2013), Archäologisch-Geophysikalische Prospektion Meillionydd/Wales. Unpubl. report GAG 12016, Wien: ZAMG – Archaeo Prospections.

Lynch, F., Aldhouse-Green, S., Davies, G.L. (2000), Prehistoric Wales. Stroud: Sutton Publishing.

Mac Neill, E. (1923), Ancient Irish Law. The Law of Status or Franchise. Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy 36 C: 265-316.

Möller, K. (2017), „Dead men walking" – Zum weitgehenden Fehlen eisenzeitlicher Bestattungen in Nordwest-Wales. In: Karl, R., Leskovar, J. [Hrsg.], Interpretierte Eisenzeiten. Tagungsbeiträge der 7. Linzer Gespräche zur interpretativen Eisenzeitarchäologie. Studien zur Kulturgeschichte von Oberösterreich 47: 67-74.

Mytum, H. (2013), Monumentality in Later Prehistory: Building and Rebuilding Castell Henllys Hillfort. New York: Springer.

Mytum, H. (2017), Castell Henllys rides again. Harold Mytum's Pages, https://hmytum.wordpress.com/2017/05/10/first-blog-post/ [13.1.2019].

Mytum, H. (2018), Castell Henllys again – The Earthwatch roundhouse. Harold Mytum's Pages, https://hmytum.wordpress.com/2018/08/03/castell-henllys-again-the-earthwatch-roundhousemartha-e/ [13.1.2019].

Foerster, H. von, Glasersfeld, E. von, Hejl, P.M., Schmidt, S.J., Watzlawick, P. (1992), Einführung in den Konstruktivismus. München: Piper.